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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: EAID PHUM PREL KE
SUBJECT: DROUGHT RECOVERY ASSESSMENT ? MARSABIT
DISTRICT

SUMMARY

¶1. Following severe drought conditions in 2006, livestock, agriculture, nutrition, and livelihoods are improving in Marsabit District of northern Kenya. A successful short rains season from October through December and coordinated relief efforts combined to boost early drought recovery of affected communities. While pastoralists require several cycles of successful rains to restore herd sizes to sustainable levels, livestock are beginning to rebound, and agro-pastoralists are benefiting from productive post-rain harvests. For most areas of Marsabit District, the drought emergency has ended and early indicators point towards initial recovery in most sectors. As a result, no additional emergency interventions are required at this time. End summary.

BACKGROUND

¶2. Successive periods of failed rains led to a severe food insecurity and livelihoods crisis in 2006, impacting nearly 3 million nomadic and agro-pastoralists throughout northern Kenya. Heavy rainfall during the short October to December 2006 rains allowed for improved agricultural conditions, however, flooding temporarily delayed emergency drought recovery activities in many districts. In addition, an outbreak of Rift Valley fever in northeastern Kenya, and the resulting ban on slaughtering animals, interrupted the livestock trade and stalled livelihood recovery in some of the worst-affected regions.

¶3. A USAID Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) assessment team traveled to Marsabit District in northern Kenya from March 19 to 22 to evaluate drought

recovery conditions. The team met with relief agencies, Government of Kenya (GOK) officials, and affected communities to determine the current humanitarian situation, monitor ongoing recovery programs, and develop recommendations for future action as appropriate.

EARLY STAGES OF RECOVERY

¶4. Most communities in Marsabit have begun to recover from emergency drought conditions following a strong short rains season and targeted assistance programs such as seed and food aid distributions and animal re-stocking. Relief organizations report that the sufficient quantity and broad distribution of the short rains has led to general improvement in livestock conditions, strong production in staple crops, and a positive trend in animal and human health. Malnutrition appears to be limited to areas of chronic poverty, including North Horr and Loiyangalani divisions, according to GOK monthly assessments.

¶5. At the end of the current dry season, animal grazing pastures remain adequate and farmers are beginning to harvest post-rain crops of maize, millet, sorghum, beans, and cowpeas. Communities indicated that there have been no significant disease outbreaks in either animals or humans since the short rains, and agro-pastoralists did not report problems with pests during the recent harvest. There were no confirmed or suspected cases of Rift Valley fever in Marsabit District, and the GOK Arid Lands Resources Management Program indicated that livestock prices are beginning

to rise following a temporary decline related to the animal slaughter ban and fears of the nearby outbreak.

¶6. Requirements for complete drought recovery differ for agro-pastoralists versus pastoralist communities, due to the additional time required for herds to achieve sustainable levels through several breeding cycles. While a successful post-short rains harvest can mean improved nutrition and income for farming communities within three to four months, nine and twelve month gestation cycles for cattle and camels mean delayed milk production and herd recovery. Following herd losses of 50 to 70 percent, several breeding cycles will be required for most herds to reach pre-drought levels.

¶7. The implication of this multiple-phase recovery for pastoralists is evident in the joint UN World Food Program and Kenyan Red Cross post-short rains food security assessment in February. Red Cross officials reported preliminary recommendations for a 20 percent reduction in targeted Marsabit beneficiaries of food aid in March, from 80,000 to approximately 60,000. Despite recognizing strong early recovery across sectors and areas, the Red Cross noted that the limited reduction was due to the longer recovery period for pastoralists.

COORDINATED RELIEF EFFORTS

¶8. The OFDA assessment team received multiple reports of successful coordination among non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and GOK agencies conducting relief activities. Regular coordination meetings in Nairobi and at the field level served to effectively prevent overlap in animal restocking, seed distribution, and animal vaccination programs. However, one NGO noted that GOK restocking programs provided fewer sheep or goats per family than recommended minimums as outlined by the Ministry of Livestock, thereby delaying full herd recovery for some families.

USAID EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

¶9. In fiscal year 2006, OFDA provided more than $5.6 million for emergency water and sanitation, and food security and agriculture drought recovery activities throughout Kenya, including more than $820,000 for emergency assistance in Marsabit District. OFDA programs in Marsabit included animal vaccinations to help sustain drought-weakened herds, dam rehabilitation and rainwater catchment systems to reduce vulnerability during the dry seasons, and hygiene education to prevent the spread of water-born illnesses.

¶10. The NGO Living Waters is building 30 water catchment tanks and six dams for six pastoralist communities in northern Marsabit. By working with local elders to identify suitable locations for the projects, the tanks and dams complement existing water facilities and provide safe drinking water during the dry seasons. Each tank can hold 80,000 liters and sustain approximately 50 households for one month, while nearby boreholes will continue to be used for livestock.

¶11. The NGO Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has excavated or rehabilitated six dams throughout Marsabit, which can provide up to five months of

drinking water for milk-producing livestock. By restricting usage of the dams to limited animals from each household, local villages are effectively boosting community nutrition from regular milk consumption, and extending the duration of the water during drought seasons. Non-milk producing animals are able to travel farther to additional year-round water points. CRS has also constructed rainwater catchment systems and storage tanks for nine schools in Marsabit, which provide drinking and cooking water for students and teachers.

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

¶12. OFDA supported drought interventions in Marsabit initiated in late 2006, including the rehabilitation of water pans and rain harvesting systems, have improved access to water and are benefiting residents and their livestock during the current dry season.

¶13. Following the recent assessment of humanitarian conditions and ongoing relief activities, the OFDA team concluded that no additional emergency interventions are currently required for Marsabit District. However, the performance of upcoming rainy seasons and historic tension between tribes in the area have the potential to influence drought recovery for both nomadic and agro-pastoralists in the area.

¶14. Sporadic and low-intensity conflict, particularly between the Borana and Gabra tribes, often escalates during rainy periods when the different groups are more mobile and come into contact with greater frequency. While confrontations often arise when competing for water resources, OFDA noted several reports of increased tension related to political representation and upcoming elections. Although violence between the tribes is infrequent, tensions do occasionally restrict grazing patterns and have the potential to negatively impact animal health and human livelihoods.

¶15. Relief agencies stated that more frequent de-silting of water points could minimize competition for water between different tribes during rainy seasons. In addition, a larger government presence along the Kenya-Ethiopia border would be beneficial in

restricting cross-border movement and resulting skirmishes as Ethiopian pastoralists attempt to secure additional grazing areas in northern Kenya.

¶16. The Nairobi-based OFDA regional advisor will continue to monitor the situation and work with partner NGOs to identify emerging humanitarian issues.

RANNEBERGER